

STATEMENT OF T. DESTRY JARVIS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS REGARDING, H.R. 1567, TO PROVIDE FOR THE DESIGNATION OF ADDITIONAL WILDERNESS LANDS IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES.

JUNE 17, 1997

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1567, a bill to provide for the designation of additional wilderness lands in the eastern United States.

The Department of the Interior opposes this legislation. While we normally appreciate the efforts of the Congress to add federal lands to the National Wilderness Preservation System, H.R. 1567 sets up a redundant wilderness study and review process for lands in the eastern United States. In addition, the bill inappropriately directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to study vast tracts of state and private lands which are neither intermixed nor adjacent to federally managed lands for potential wilderness designation. Such a provision is beyond the normal jurisdiction of the respective Departments.

The proposed legislation, H.R. 1567, the Eastern Wilderness Act is similar in intent to the original Wilderness Act of 1964 (78 Stat. 890) with some major notable exceptions. Section 2 of the bill redefines the criteria for “wilderness” east of the 100th meridian. Under this section federal, state and private lands over 500 acres could now qualify for wilderness designation. Section 3 directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to study and inventory areas under these new criteria.

Except for section 4(a) which provides for a 15-year study process, the remainder of the bill duplicates the existing provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964 nearly verbatim, to the point of including a reference to the now abolished Bureau of Mines. These existing provisions would be applicable to new studies and newly designated areas without their inclusion in H.R. 1567.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to bring to the attention of the Subcommittee that throughout the 1970's the National Park Service as authorized by the 1964 Wilderness Act conducted a nationwide inventory and assessment of National Park System lands for potential wilderness suitability. Each of these suitability studies were accompanied by a full environmental impact statement (EIS) and public involvement process which included participation in the development of alternative proposals and the review of all draft documents. As a result of these EISs the National Park Service made recommendations which were subsequently sent to Congress by Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter via formal transmittal memoranda.

Lands currently within the National Park System are already subject to higher standards of conservation than for most other federal lands. However, our national parks are faced with ever-increasing threats which can compromise their "wilderness integrity" even under the existing mandates of the National Park Service. Wilderness designation provides an additional statutory protection for the National Park System lands, including providing for outstanding opportunities for solitude, and ensuring that management provides that the forces of nature are dominant on the landscape.

To date, Congress has designated wilderness in 44 units of the National Park System totaling nearly

43.2 million acres, seven areas of which are located in the eastern United States covering approximately 1.4 million acres. These seven areas are Everglades and Shenandoah National Parks; Fire Island, Gulf Islands, and Cumberland Island National Seashores; Congaree Swamp National Monument; and Buffalo National River.

Similarly, the Fish and Wildlife Service has inventoried National Wildlife Refuge and Fish Hatchery lands for wilderness suitability. There are currently 75 designated wilderness areas on Fish and Wildlife Service lands totaling nearly 20.7 million acres. Of these, 38 areas covering more than 540,000 acres are east of the 100th meridian.

This concludes my prepared remarks. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and would be happy to answer any of your questions.